

Grazing Land Management Brush Management

NE Fact Sheet-1

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What

Brush management attempts to restore balance to the natural plant community. It manipulates brush to meet the specific needs of the livestock producer and the land.

Why

Brush plants use three to five times more water than native grasses for each pound of leaf growth. Reducing plants that use a lot of water while increasing water-efficient plants results in more quality forage for livestock, and allows more water to infiltrate the soil recharging underground aquifers

Brush management also reduces the competition that desirable plants have for sunlight and nutrients, which increase forage yield

As brush management improves the condition of grassland, the healthier and thicker grass slows runoff, allowing more moisture to soak into the soil and reducing soil erosion by water and wind

How

Thinning dense brush in an area creates diverse wildlife habitat--places for wildlife to find cover, nesting areas and food. Many livestock producers find that the improved habitat attracts game for hunting. By leasing hunting rights, they increase income from their ranch. ,

Brush can be controlled by chemical or mechanical methods, fire, and improved grazing management. The method to use depends on economics, soil, the type of brush on the land, the topography and the type of ranch operation. Most successful efforts involve a combination of brush control methods.

Chemical methods involve applying herbicides to the soil or the plant. Because many brush species are tolerant to some herbicides, results vary. Success depends on applying the right herbicide at the correct rate when weather conditions are favorable and when the species to be controlled is weakest.

Mechanical methods of brush control include mowing, axing, root plowing, and bulldozing. These methods have proven quite effective, but are often costly.

Prescribed burning is used by many livestock producers to control undesirable woody plants. Historically, nature's most effective brush management practice was fire. Deciding factors for use of this practice include sufficient fuel for the fire, favorable weather conditions, and safety.

Proper grazing management prevents overgrazing and assures healthy, vigorous forage. In a healthy Range ecosystem, brush problems are reduced.

To be effective, any option used to manage brush on rangeland, hay land and pasture must be preceded and followed by proper grazing management. Forage yields will improve after the desirable native grasses have had a chance to recover and plant succession has begun. On grassland where brush has been removed, the pasture should be rested and grazing time should be limited during the first growing season after treatment. This allows the desirable grasses to establish themselves. Reseeding, of these areas may be necessary where a natural seed source of the desirable forage species are not available. Grazing management must be a continuous process. Uncontrolled grazing probably caused the brush problem. Treating the problem without addressing the cause is ,only a short-term solution. Most range, hay and pasture improvement practices take time to show changes. Do not be discouraged if drastic changes are not noticed immediately. With careful planning, and management of the practices, the grassland will improve.

Where to Get Help

For more information on range, hay and pasture management, contact the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. It is listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government."